

**Focused Learning Lesson**  
**American History**  
**Grade Level: 11**  
**H-1B-H7**

**Overview:**

This lesson focuses on the “Old” and “New” American immigration that occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Students will concentrate on the ethnic groups that came to America, the problems that they faced and their impact on American urbanization at the turn of the century. In the culminating activity for this lesson, students will write letters from the perspective of an American immigrant, explaining his or her settlement, living and working conditions in America, and hopes for the future.

**Approximate Duration:**

45 minutes

**Benchmarks and GLEs:**

H-1B-H7 - Describing the immigration and internal migration patterns that have occurred in the history of the United States and examine the cultural and social changes that have resulted

GLEs:

22. Describe the phases, geographic origins, and motivations behind mass migration into and within the United States

23. Explain the causes of the late nineteenth-century urbanization of the United States, including immigration and migration from rural areas, and discuss its impact in such areas as housing, political structures, and public health

**Objectives:**

1. The learner will identify immigrant groups which settled in the United States, explain the challenges they faced, and examine their effect on American society.

**Teacher Preparation:**

- To prepare for this lesson, the teacher will need to review the content notes provided in Attachment 1 and prepare to lead a class discussion about American Immigration and Urbanization.
- Additionally, the teacher may wish to review the excerpt from “How the Other Half Lives,” which is provided in Attachment 2.

**Materials/Equipment/Resources:**

- Teacher notes on Immigration and Urbanization (provided in Attachment 1)
- Overhead Projector for lecture or copies of notes for students
- Maps of the United States and Europe
- Student copies of excerpt from “How the Other Half Lives” by Jacob Riis (provided in Attachment 2)

- Student copies of “A Letter Home” Assessment Activity (provided in Attachment 3)

### **Lesson Procedures:**

#### **Set or Opener**

Begin the lesson by having a brief discussion with students about their own families and their ethnic identities. Have students share information about their family ancestry, such as from what country their family originally came.

#### **Body of the Lesson**

Introduce the term “immigrant” and explain that most American families were immigrants at one point in history.

Explain that in the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was an influx of immigrants coming to America.

Using the teacher notes on “old” and “new” immigration, explain the differences between these two groups, and have students identify the originating countries of these two groups on a map of Europe.

Using a map of the United States, point out the two major immigration stations (Ellis Island in New York Harbor and Angel Island in San Francisco Bay) and discuss why these immigration stations were located on islands off the coast of the United States.

1. Discuss with the students that most Chinese and Japanese immigrants entered through Angel Island and most European immigrants entered at Ellis Island. Ask students to suggest reasons why this happened.
2. Have students create a list of reasons why immigrants came and settled in American cities and why rural Americans were moving to the cities.
3. Lead students in brainstorming current reasons why a person would choose to live in the city rather than the country.
4. Discuss with students the reasons why early immigrants chose to live in the cities.
5. Have students create a list of social problems that Americans faced living in the cities during the period of immigration and urbanization.
6. Explain that an author by the name of Jacob Riis wrote about what it was like to live in the cities during this time. Then, hand out copies of the excerpt from *How the Other Half Lives*.

#### **Closure**

Have the students read silently or take turns reading the excerpt aloud and then discuss as a class the details that Riis provides about social and cultural life of immigrants and city-dwellers.

#### **Assessment Items:**

The assessment item for this lesson has the students imagining that they were immigrants who came to America at the turn of the century and are now writing letters to family members back home. In the letter, the students must indicate their country of origin, where they settled, the job they have, their living conditions, and the quality of life in American cities. The students writing should indicate a clear understanding of

immigration patterns and the cultural and social changes that resulted in American cities. A rubric has been provided with the assessment in Attachment #3.

### **Reference Links and Technology Connections**

Danzer, G., J. Klor de Alva, L. Wilson, & N. Woloch. (1998). *The Americans*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell.

Houghton Mifflin Social Studies, (n.d.). Excerpt from how the other half lives, by Jacob Riis . retrieved Feb 07, 2004, from Understanding Primary Sources Web site:  
<http://www.eduplace.com/ss/hmss/8/unit/act6.1blm1.html>

## Immigrants and Urbanization

### Old Immigration

- Before 1890, most immigrants came from countries in Western and Northern Europe, including Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany.

### New Immigration

- Beginning in the 1890s, increasing numbers came from Southern and Eastern Europe, especially Italy, Austria- Hungary and Russia.

### Reasons for immigration included:

1. To escape religious persecution (e.g., Jews)
  2. Rising population, which resulted in a lack of land available for farming and too few industrial jobs.
  3. A spirit of reform and revolt in Europe influenced people to start independent lives in the U.S.
- In the mid 1800s, Chinese came to seek their fortunes in gold and stayed to build the nation's first transcontinental railroad, as well as other railroads in the West, and then turned to farming, mining, and domestic service.

### Entering the U.S.

- Many immigrants entering the eastern U.S. had to pass inspection at the immigrant station at Ellis Island in New York Harbor.
- They had to pass a physical exam by a doctor.
- A government inspector checked immigrant's legal requirements for entering the United States:
  - Passing a literacy test
  - Proof that they were able to work
  - Proof that they had money. (\$25)
- On the west Coast, most Asians went through immigration processing at Angel Island in San Francisco Bay.

### Culture Shock

- Confusion and anxiety resulting from immersion in a culture whose ways of thinking and acting they didn't understand, led many immigrants to live in ethnic communities of their own nationality (e.g., "Chinatown" in San Francisco, "Little Italy" in New York City).

### Urbanization

- Cities were the cheapest and most convenient places to live.
- Cities also offered unskilled laborers steady jobs in mills and factories and provided the social support of other immigrant families.

- Cultural opportunities made life in the city fun and exciting (plays, museums, baseball games, etc.)

### **Problems**

- Housing
  - Dumbbell Tenements- long, narrow five or six story buildings that were shaped like barbells (to allow for airshafts and windows.)
  - Oftentimes, people threw garbage down the airshafts. Windows were nailed shut because of factory smoke.
- Transportation
  - Mass transit systems developed such as cable cars, electric streetcars and subways.
- Supplying fresh, safe water
- Trash removal
- Fighting fires and crime
- Political Machines
  - An organized group that controlled the activities of a political party in a city and offered services to voters and businesses in exchange for political or financial support.
  - Although political machines provided many vital services, many political bosses fell victim to greed and corruption as their power and influence grew.

**Excerpt from**  
***How the Other Half Lives***  
**by Jacob Riis**

Be a little careful, please! The hall is dark and you might stumble over the children pitching pennies back there. Not that it would hurt them; kicks and cuffs are their daily diet. They have little else. Here where the hall turns and dives into utter darkness is a step, and another, another. A flight of stairs. You can feel your way, if you cannot see it. Close? Yes! What would you have? All the fresh air that ever enters these stairs comes from the hall-door that is forever slamming, and from the windows of dark bedrooms that in turn receive from the stairs their sole supply of the elements God meant to be free, but man deals out with such niggardly hand. That was a woman filling her pail by the hydrant you just bumped against. The sinks are in the hallway, that all the tenants may have access--and all be poisoned alike by their summer stenches. Hear the pump squeak! It is the lullaby of tenement-house babes. In summer, when a thousand thirsty throats pant for a cooling drink in this block, it is worked in vain. But the saloon, whose open door you passed in the hall, is always there. The smell of it has followed you up. Here is a door. Listen! That short hacking cough, that tiny, helpless wail--what do they mean? They mean that the soiled bow of white you saw on the door downstairs will have another story to tell--Oh! a sadly familiar story--before the day is at an end. The child is dying with measles. With half a chance it might have lived; but it had none. That dark bedroom killed it.

. . . . What if the words ring in your ears as we grope our way up the stairs and down from floor to floor, listening to the sounds behind the closed doors--some of quarrelling, some of coarse songs, more of profanity. They are true. When the summer heats come with their suffering they have meaning more terrible than words can tell. Come over here. Step carefully over this baby--it is a baby, spite of its rags and dirt--under these iron bridges called fire-escapes, but loaded down, despite the incessant watchfulness of the firemen, with broken household goods, with wash-tubs and barrels, over which no man could climb from a fire. This gap between dingy brick-walls is the yard. That strip of smoke-colored sky up there is the heaven of these people. Do you wonder the name does not attract them to the churches? That baby's parents live in the rear tenement here. She is at least as clean as the steps we are now climbing. There are plenty of houses with half a hundred such in. The tenement is much like the one in front we just left, only fouler, closer, darker--we will not say more cheerless. The word is a mockery. A hundred thousand people lived in rear tenements in New York last year. Here is a room neater than the rest. The woman, a stout matron with hard lines of care in her face, is at the wash-tub. "I try to keep the children clean," she says, apologetically, but with a hopeless glance around. The spice of hot soapsuds is added to the air already tainted with the smell of boiling cabbage, of rags and uncleanness all about. It makes an overpowering

compound. It is Thursday, but patched linen is hung upon the pulley-line from the window. There is no Monday cleaning in the tenements. It is wash-day all the week round, for a change of clothing is scarce among the poor. They are poverty's honest badge, these perennial lines of rags hung out to dry, those that are not the washerwoman's professional shingle. The true line to be drawn between pauperism and honest poverty is the clothes-line. With it begins the effort to be clean that is the first and the best evidence of a desire to be honest.

. . . . The twenty-five cent lodging-house keeps up the pretense of a bedroom, though the head-high partition enclosing a space just large enough to hold a cot and a chair and allow the man room to pull off his clothes is the shallowest of all pretenses. The fifteen-cent bed stands boldly forth without screen in a room full of bunks with sheets as yellow and blankets as foul. At the ten-cent level the locker for the sleeper's clothes disappears. There is no longer need of it. The tramp limit is reached, and there is nothing to lock up save, on general principles, the lodger. Usually the ten- and seven-cent lodgings are different grades of the same abomination. Some sort of an apology for a bed, with mattress and blanket, represents the aristocratic purchase of the tramp who, by a lucky stroke of beggary, has exchanged the chance of an empty box or ash-barrel for shelter on the quality floor of one of these "hotels." A strip of canvas, strung between rough timbers, without covering of any kind, does for the couch of the seven-cent lodger who prefers the questionable comfort of a red-hot stove close to his elbow to the revelry of the stale-beer dive. It is not the most secure perch in the world. Uneasy sleepers roll off at intervals, but they have not far to fall to the next tier of bunks; and the commotion that ensues is speedily quieted by the boss and his club. On cold winter nights, when every bunk had its tenant, I have stood in such a lodging-room more than once, and listening to the snoring of the sleepers like the regular strokes of an engine, and the slow creaking of the beams under their restless weight, imagined myself on shipboard and experienced the very real nausea of sea-sickness. The one thing that did not favor the deception was the air; its character could not be mistaken.

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## Rubric for Assessment

<b>4</b>	The student demonstrates a firm grasp of the topic and addresses each of the required points discussed in the directions. The student used details from the lecture and reading to support his writing.
<b>3</b>	The student demonstrates knowledge of the topic and addresses each of the required points discussed in the directions.
<b>2</b>	The student shows a basic understanding of the topic, but does not address each of the required points discussed in the directions.
<b>1</b>	The student demonstrates some understanding of the topic and addresses one or more of the points discussed in the directions.
<b>0</b>	The student does not display knowledge of the topic and fails to address any points discussed in the directions.